

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

MARCH 1996

ONE DOLLAR





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr



Mel White

Mild weather, sprouting vegetation, migrating birds and warming water temperatures signal the beginning of a new spring. This is the time that most species of fish prepare for the task of reproduction. Spawning runs have already begun for some anadromous species—those species that leave larger bodies of water to run up rivers, streams and creeks to spawn. Lake and pond species move into the shallows to seek out spawning beds. Aquatic vegetation is also beginning its growth cycle anew. The underwater world is active as well as the world above.

Anglers, too, are getting restless. The desire to make that first cast grows stronger with each passing day. They know that spring is a

time for some of the best fishing available on Virginia streams and lakes. Fish are concentrated, active and hungry after a winter of relative lethargy. Anglers are anxious for the word on what is "running" and where. What streams have been stocked. What the water conditions are at their favorite lake or river.

Department fisheries biologists, biologist aides, fish culturists and helpers are also preparing for the season. There will be sampling to be done; a way of taking the pulse of a body of water to make sure it's healthy. Trap-nets, gill nets and electro-fishing equipment is checked, cleaned and repaired. Winter was spent analyzing data from last year, but now its time to go afield and add to the store of knowledge so size and population trends can be detected.

Department fisheries personnel manage some 3,400 acres of 33 Department-owned lakes and ponds. In addition, they monitor, manage or assist in managing 88 other lakes under 1,000 acres in size, as well as 14 reservoirs of 1,000 acres or more; for a total of 134,525 acres of water. Added to that, Virginia has 25,000 miles of warmwater streams, 2,000 miles of wild trout streams, and over 400 miles of stocked trout water, all of which provide fishing opportunities.

To provide fish for stocking, the Fish Division has 9 fish hatcheries and rearing stations, 4 for trout or coldwater species, and 4 for

warmwater species, with one doing double duty. The true trout hatcheries are located at Paint Bank (Craig County), Marion (Smyth County) and Wytheville (Wythe County), with Coursey Springs (Bath County), Montebello (Nelson County) and Buller (Smyth County) being rearing stations only. The warmwater hatcheries and rearing stations, which raise musky, northern pike, walleye, striped bass and catfish, include Buller, Front Royal (Warren County), Brookneal (Campbell County) and King & Queen (King & Queen County). King & Queen also raises tidal stripers, shad and herring.

With all this work underway, I hope that you are ready to do your part and go out and enjoy the many fishing opportunities the Commonwealth has to offer. Please feel free to make use of our trout stocking information line, (804) 525-FISH. We will be glad to let you know where the most recent trout stockings have occurred.

If you have difficulty locating good fishing opportunities, give us a call at (804) 367-9369, and we will be happy to help you find one. We would also like to hear from you anytime about your fishing experiences. I would love for you to share some of your stories with us.

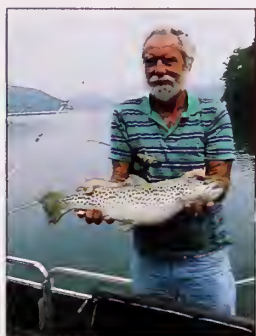
Thank you for all of your support for this Department and its mission of wildlife management.

Get Ready for Fishing

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



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Lake Moomaw, page 24.

Cover: Photo by Dwight Dyke.

Back cover: Photo by Bill Lea.

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

Trout Fishing in the Shenandoah National Park



Quill Gordon



Good trout streams often run through heavily shaded hollows in Shenandoah National Park.

With its many pleasures, the Park can challenge your love of fly-fishing and test your skills.

by Harry Murray

What do you call good trout fishing?

Obviously, different anglers will have greatly diverse answers for this. If you've been playing the game a long time, you may agree with the late, great Ray Bergman's views that "anything which makes the trout more difficult to take improves sport." However, if you are just getting into serious trout fishing you may prefer a situation where it is relatively easy to catch quite a few wild trout on dry flies.

Actually, both of these events occurred with me in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park.

The challenging angling took place last August when the streams were quite low and clear and the trout, although extremely wary, were feeding actively on Chironomide midges. Only by approaching each pool on my hands and knees and fishing my smallest midges on a 7X tippet with a two weight rod could I take the trout consistently.

The easy fishing occurred one spring day when I introduced my 12-year-old son, Jeff, to trout fishing in the Park. The water level was perfect, there were two different mayflies hatching in good numbers and every pool had several brookies feeding on the surface. Jeff caught so many trout that day on dry flies that he became the one that got "hooked."

Between these two extremes, you can find almost any type trout fishing in the Shenandoah National Park which you desire.

Since the hatches and various fishing conditions are influenced predominately by the sea-

sons, a logical way to find the particular type angling which you prefer is to take an overall view of the Park from spring until the fall.

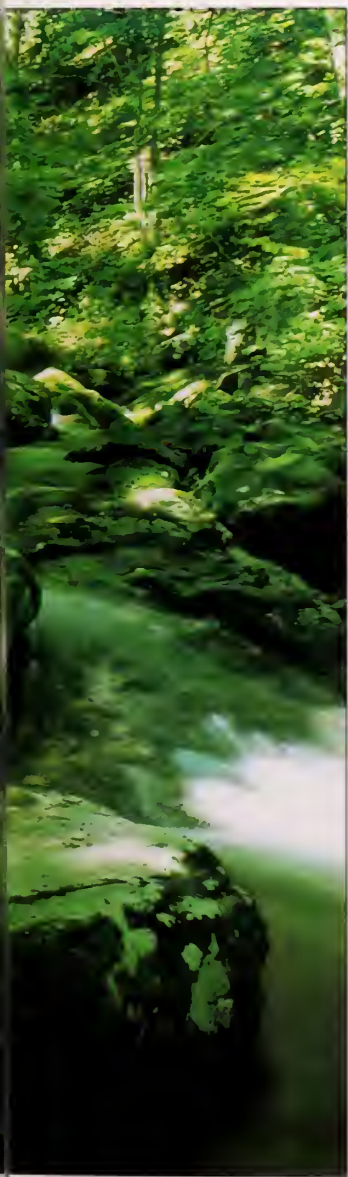
By the time the general Park trout season opens the third Saturday in March its water temperatures are normally warm enough for the brookies to feed on the surface. (At publication, Park officials were reviewing their regulations and were considering adopting a season that parallels the state's year round trout season.) An even more exciting aspect is the fact that often the aquatic hatches begin about this time. Blending these two natural features, you can see that one can expect good dry fly action considerably ahead of those streams further north.

The much loved Quill Gordon mayfly (*Epeorus pleuralis*) is the first to show up, with good dun emergence occurring by early afternoons in mid-March and the spinners returning to the stream about dusk. In fact, it is quite likely to find both duns and spinners on the water at the same time in the evening.

Now you don't have to get all bent out of shape about whether to fish a dun or a spinner pattern to meet the whims of the trout. Most of these brookies haven't "gone away to school" yet and will gladly take a reasonable facsimile at this time of the year. The standard Quill Gordon dry in size 12 and 14 is a good pattern, but about 15 years ago at the encouragement of one



Mr. Rapidan Dry



©Dwight Dyke

of my college fly tying classes I developed the Mr. Rapidan Dry for this and another hatch. My students had complained about having trouble keeping the conventional hatch-matching patterns floating in choppy streams and their problems of seeing the dark flies in the heavily shaded hollows. Utilizing tying materials with the best flotation qualities and a yellow calf tail wing for good angler visibility the Mr. Rapidan Dry fly was born. Not only is it exceptionally effective in the Park, but I now ship them all across the country from my fly shop. Mr. Rapidan Dry: Body-34 Fly Rite, Tail-moose body hair, Hackle-grizzly & brown #2 Metz Neck, Wing-yellow calf tail.



Blue Quill

Most Park anglers are quite successful in late March and early April. Many trout are out on feeding stations on the lips of the pools and in the corners at the heads of the pools feeding on the Quill Gordons and the Blue Quills (*Paraleptophlebia adoptiva*). The standard Blue Quill in a size 16 or 18 does a good job when the fish are working on the little naturals.

There are two features concerning the Blue Quill hatch, both totally controlled by nature, which you should be aware of for your maximum success and excitement.

Some years, usually dependent upon the rock-rolling stream levels over the previous season, we have exceptionally heavy hatches of this beautiful little fly. I clearly remember one day as I walked around the stream bank to get from one pool to another, seeing the profusion of duns sitting on the rocks to dry their wings. I literally had trouble finding spots on which I could step so I wouldn't

step on the flies. (I know, they were supposed to have flown to the tree limbs to dry their wings, but apparently they hadn't passed entomology 101.) Obviously, with this concentration of flies great things can happen. For example, often at high elevations in the Park the air temperature may be quite low when the Blue Quills are emerging. I have seen this greatly prolong the time they need to slip from their nymph shucks and dry their wings enough to get off the water. This is where the "excitement" I referred to comes in. Often the half-emerged nymphs and seemingly drunk duns are forced into the back eddies by

but it ranks right up there with some of the most gratifying. It goes like this. As I approach each pool I carefully scan the entire surface along both banks to see if a back eddy exists. These may be as small as a basketball or as large as a Ping-Pong table, but they are all characterized by a current flowing opposite of the main stream—upstream if you will. Closer scrutiny shows me I have basically a big Lazy Susan setup with the current going around in a continuous circle. My problem is determining exactly where the trout is located, since he can easily pluck his meal from any spot by staying put. First, I look for his rise form



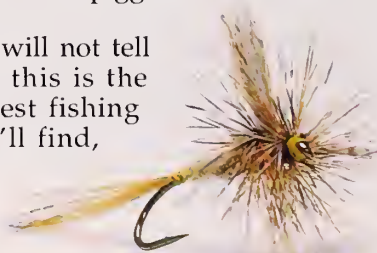
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Close scrutiny of the water is a must for the successful Park angler.

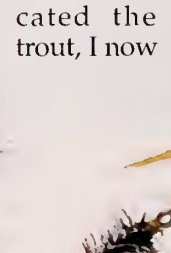
the currents, where they drift helplessly around and around at the mercy of the waiting trout. This is a game the trout are very familiar with, and you can depend upon the largest fish in each pool claiming his feeding station under this floating raft of Blue Quills, sipping them in at a piggish rate.

I will not tell you this is the easiest fishing you'll find,

and often this tells it all. However, sometimes they sip in the shuck-stuck forms so delicately one must actually see the fish to know where to drop the fly. By whichever means I located the trout, I now



Grey Fox



Nidge



March Snow Dry

know exactly where he is and precisely what he's feeding upon. The outcome is totally dependent upon my skills, and I must humbly admit that many big trout feeding in this manner outsmart me.

By mid-April the March Brown (*Stenonema vicarium*) our largest consistent mayfly is emerging—our Green Drakes often take a sabbatical. The presence of this big fly, often overlapping with the first two mentioned, means the trout have an abundance of food. Blending this with the facts that the water levels and water temperatures are now ideal, one can easily see why this is a perfect time to fish

on the streams, can greatly increase both the quality and quantity of the catch.

For example, shortly before the time for the March Browns to emerge as duns the nymphs move from the heavy water in midstream to moderate current shallows along the banks. The trout are quite aware of this miniature migration and move into the shallows for an easy meal. Although the major insect concentration in the shallows is in the nymph form, the trout are seldom selective, and a well-placed dry will usually bring a solid strike. In



Light Cahill



Little Yellow Stonefly Dry



Grey Yellow No Hackle Dry

Overlapping the March Brown hatch are the Grey Fox (*Stenonema fuscum*) and the Light Cahill (*Stenonema canadense*) emerges which provide excellent classic dry fly-fishing until the latter part of May. However, historically our stream levels begin dropping by this time, dictating a more cau-



©Dwight Dyke



Doug Stamm

Fishing these streams is not the easiest angling in Virginia, but it is fun. The reward, a nice fat brookie, above.

the Park. You can now knot on a size 12 or 14 March Brown Dry or a 14 Mr. Rapidan Dry (this was the second natural this fly mimics) and get outstanding fishing. I conduct my regular trout fly-fishing schools at this time and many beginning anglers land a surprising number of trout on dries.

One does not have to be an accomplished entomologist in order to get good trout fishing in the Park. A basic understanding of the insects, or often just being observant of what is occurring

order to take full advantage of this feeding spree I carefully study the shallows of each pool during this part of the season before I fish a pool. Sometimes I'll spot an honest rise form, sometimes I see nervous water as we say on the bonefish flats as a fish moves to take a nymph. Any slight movement or disturbance in the shallows is my cue to deliver a cast to that spot. Experience has taught the older fish of the bounty here, so often these areas will yield the largest trout of that pool.

tious approach on our part. I normally fish the Grey Fox in a size 14 since that matches the naturals best. But, by the time the Light Cahills are in full swing a size 16 in the standard pattern or the Grey Yellow No Hackle Dun in size 16 both fished on 6X leaders give me better catches.

Simultaneously with the *Stenonemas* are the Little Yellow Stoneflies



Light Zofopus



Charlie Foxes Sulphur



Crowe Beetle

(*Isoperla bilineata*) which give us excellent action. My favorite flies for this hatch are the Little Yellow Stonefly Dry and the Light Goofus, both in size 16.

By early summer only one of our much loved mayflies is left, the Sulphur (*Ephemerella dorothea*), which is well matched with Charlie Foxes Sulphur and Grey Yellow No Hackles in sizes 16 and 18. However, nature compensates these brookies quite well by providing an abundance of terrestrial insects. Ants, beetles, leaf hoppers, crickets, and yes, even grasshoppers are present in profusion.

I honestly believe that brook trout in the Park consume more ants than all aquatic insects combined for the simple reason that there are more ants around and they are present for a longer period. My favorite ant patterns are McMurray's, Fur Body Flying Ants and Foam Ants, all in both black and cinnamon colors in sizes 14 down to 22.

I especially enjoy the terrestrial fishing during the summer. The streams are low and clear, and normally I can spot a fish or two on feeding stations in each pool. Knowing that my approach must be extremely cautious, my presentation delicate and my delivery right on target, I plan to put all of my eggs in one basket and make the first cast perfect. Experience has taught me that if I violate any of these axioms I may not get a second shot at that specific fish. Tough? You bet, but extremely rewarding when done properly.

The abundance of many different types of natural beetles throughout these mountains makes them a readily available food source for the trout. Often I'll use a size 14 or 16 Crowe Beetle as a searching pattern in addition to fishing it to rising fish. Its larger size has the potential for moving fish a fair distance, so if I don't know specifically where the trout is and drop my Beetle several feet from his feeding lane, he may still swing over and suck it in.

Over the last several years I have encountered great concentrations of grasshoppers in some of the remote sections of the Park in the fall. My entomologist friends cannot fully explain this, but for the trout it's like feeding time at the zoo. They are not always present, but my, its great when they are. A size 14 Dave's Hopper or Shenk's Hopper on 5X will give you fishing you will never forget.

If the hoppers are absent during the fall, the action reverts to the opposite end of the spectrum with small ants and the freshly emerging chironomide midges being the bill of fare.

Many anglers are quite fond of fall Park fishing because of the increased activity of the trout. The cooler stream temperatures, the abundance of natural foods and the trout's need to feed for the coming spawning season all work together in the anglers favor. I often find several fish feeding quite actively in each pool. In fact, last fall in the remote headwater section of one stream I counted 11 brookies feeding on the surface in one pool.

When I say remote, I don't mean to imply that many sections of these streams are beyond the reach of anglers who want to hike in, fish

them and hike back out the same day. Most fishermen cover the Park in this way. However, backpacking into secluded stream sections and spending a night or two will probably provide you with a trip you will never forget. The fishing is fantastic, the scenery is stimulating and the overall experience is extremely exhilarating. Backpacking and camping are permitted throughout most of the Park with the appropriate permit (see sidebar).

There are 29 major streams and many smaller feeder runs open for fishing. However, Park officials have wisely chosen to close some of the small, fragile streams to angling in order to protect the brook trout. (See sidebar.)

Since most of the Park streams are small, one quickly becomes aware of the necessity for accuracy and delicacy in fly placement. For this reason fly rods ranging from 6 1/2 to 7 1/2 feet long which possess delicate tips and balance with number two, three or four weight line are preferable.

Angling in the Shenandoah National Park is more than catching beautiful wild trout, more than inhaling its striking beauty, more than sinking into its peaceful solitude; it is a filling of a previously undetected void, with an emotion of complete satisfaction that only God can give. □

Harry Murray is a freelance writer who teaches fishing and fly tying in Edinburg, Virginia.



McMurray's



Fur Body Flying Ants



Foam Ants



Shenk's Hopper

Camping Permits and General Information

Shenandoah National Park
Headquarters
Rt. 4, Box 292
Luray, VA 22835
(703) 999-2243

Maps and Books

Three maps which cover the complete Park showing all streams, road and access trails are available for \$5.95 each, plus \$2.00 shipping and handling. North section covers milepost 1 through 35, Central section covers milepost 30 through 66, Southern section covers milepost 65 through 105.

Harry Murray's book *Trout Fishing in the Shenandoah National Park* gives all stream access areas, angling tactics, park and private facilities and campgrounds. \$10.95 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling.

Available from:
The Shenandoah Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 156
Edinburg, VA 22824
(703) 984-4212



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Part of the lure of fishing in the park, plenty of free scenery.



'Dave's Hopper

Shed Antlers: Nature's Lost and Found

by Bob Duncan,
Director, Wildlife Division

My Granddaddy Duncan, born in Floyd County, Virginia, in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, had a saying about getting rid of something. Whether it was trading guns or dogs, when it came to parting with something, you simply had to "git shed" of it! I often recall my Granddaddy's words and this particular saying always comes to mind when I think about bucks getting "shed" of their antlers.

Interest in antler development and the phenomena of antler loss has attracted the attention of hunters and biologists throughout the years. More and more hunters and managers are collecting shed, or cast, antlers in conjunction with their scouting and/or herd monitoring activities. I must confess to a lifelong interest in this amazing cycle of antler growth and regrowth, and both my cluttered garage and my wife will attest to my fondness for bringing home shed antlers from nature's lost and found department.

Located on the mantle above my fireplace and woodstove, I still have the first matched set of antlers I found nearly 25 years ago in the Smoky Mountains of east Tennessee. Joining them is a matched



©Dwight Dyke

pair of antlers found recently in northern Virginia. While I especially treasure the matched antler pairs in my collection, most of the antlers I have picked up have been from a single side. Since some time interval may occur between casting the left and right antlers, it is unusual to find both antlers from the same buck.

February may well be the month for valentines, but it is also the time when Virginia bucks call it quits and throw in the towel with regards to the rut. Generally, the peak of antler shedding in the Old Dominion occurs in February. That is not to say that all bucks shed at the same time because they do not. However, it is actually the variations in antler casting that have made for an interesting study over the years. I suspect that the timing and frequency of antler shedding would plot on a graph in a bell-shaped curve with a few occurrences very early, a few very late, and the majority (nearly 70 percent) would fall (or drop) after the hunting season during January, February, and March.

The earliest day for a shed buck in Virginia that I can recall was a Pulaski County buck taken on December 7 during the first year of the managed hunts at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. Another Radford buck shed on, or before December 14 that year. Depending on the year and the food supply, it is not unusual to receive calls from hunters having harvested bucks that had dropped their racks. Generally, it is only a small percentage that shed before the end of the deer season on the first Saturday in January.

There is some real heartbreak that goes with the taking of a big buck only to find that one side, or the other, of the rack is lost. I recall a Southampton County deer hunter who drove into a hunt club looking for a lost hound during the latter part of the season a couple of years ago. On the back of his truck was a beautiful, big buck with five nice points on the right antler and just a fresh "stump" or base where the left antler had shed. He really did not appreciate my suggestion (made in jest, of course) that he consider

mounting the buck next to a mirror!

In another case, I know a deer manager in our Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) who rightfully became upset when a fellow hunter harvested a quality 5 1/2-year-old buck with only one antler in place. This buck was taken on December 23, 1993 as a five by zero (shed), and the base on the intact antler was a whopping 48MM! Had this "breeding buck" been taken before shedding, the inside spread would have likely been in the 24 or 25-inch class. The DMAP manager where this buck was taken had done an outstanding job of producing quality whitetails only to have someone take a shed buck as a novelty without any intention of mounting it. Of course, this situation can result from an accidental take; however, it is a different thing when a hunter knowingly takes a shed or partial shed buck.

This point was brought home to me personally during the muzzleloader season one recent fall. The largest buck I saw all season was one that I judged to be at least 4 1/2-years-old with good body size and a nice four or five points on the right antler. Unfortunately for me, the buck had

broken off the left antler about three inches above the base and I made a management decision to leave him for another year. Hopefully he will have an opportunity to grow a rack more befitting a mature whitetail buck. Do not get me wrong, I do not consider myself a "trophy" deer hunter. I do believe, however, out of respect for these magnificent deer we are privileged to hunt, that they deserve the dignity of being harvested in their prime.

Over the last 20 years of working big game checking stations, I recall

only a few situations where an antler actually came off while a hunter was loading or unloading his or her deer. I do remember adopting a personal policy of not holding on to the antlers when helping load and unload deer if it was late in the season. It just would not do to have a biologist pull off half of a "Boone and Crockett" rack! I remember a deer hunt that former Department Director, Jim Remington, and I made on December 28, 1989. A bitter cold spell had hit central Virginia, and there was a period of snow cover for a week or two. We were hunting in Tidewater when Jim took an afternoon stand, and we told him we would be back at dark. When we returned, he advised that he had shot a buck, but he just laughed when I asked about the number of points. As it turned out, Jim's buck only had one side of his antlers in place when shot, and that side popped loose when the deer hit the ground. Some folks have all the luck.

Dennis Fers,
Wildlife Manager for the Airfield 4-H Cen-



ter at Wakefield, Virginia, has maintained records on antler shedding since 1987. Admittedly, the deer at Wakefield are fed commercial rations and, thus, do not experience the variations in food that their free-ranging cousins do, but they do experience the same photoperiod (number of hours of daylight); and observations of the 4-H deer are very interesting and speak for themselves. Dennis has observed no pattern regarding which antler is shed first, the right or the left. Dennis' records indicate that virtually all of the 4-H bucks shed in mid-February. However, in 1991, Dennis observed a 4 1/2-year-old, 10-pointer that dropped on January 29 and 31. A 5 1/2-year-old, 8-pointer that shed on February 7 and 9 of 1995 was the same buck to shed both antlers on January 31, 1994.

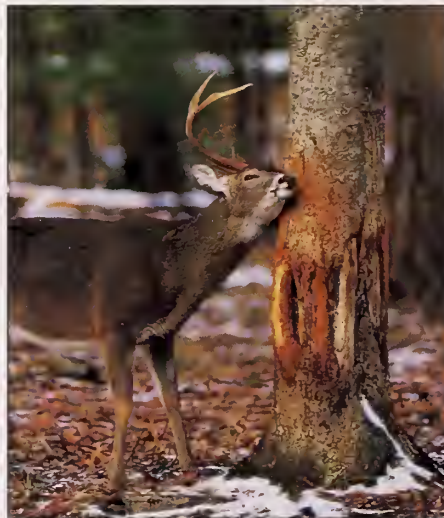
The date for the latest antler shed on record at Wakefield was in 1990 for a 2 1/2-year-old, 7-pointer that held on to his head gear until March 20 and 22. Most of the Wakefield bucks either shed on consecutive days or two or three days in between. Only rarely, and this seems to involve yearling bucks, did a buck lose one side and then carry the remaining side for more than 10 days. Apparently, when it is time for the antlers to granulate and go their separate ways, they generally do so without any delay. In the winter of '95, Dennis kept close watch and records on the antler shedding of six Wakefield bucks. The first to shed was the oldest of the group, a 5 1/2-year-old that cast his antlers on February 7 & 9. He was followed by a 2 1/2-year-old on February 28 and March 2. The three remaining bucks all shed between March 8 and March 17 with only the last buck to shed both sides on the same date.

While the mechanisms resulting in the antler cycle are imperfectly understood, there is evidence to suggest that antler growth is controlled primarily by hormones and that the amount of light via day length is a key environmental factor which triggers the process. It is known that a buck's testosterone level drops sharply after the rut and

the "superglue" bond between the antlers and their pedicle deteriorates and the antlers are cast. Branched antlered or dominate bucks seem to shed their antlers first, just as they seem to rub-out first, based on our observations here in Virginia. Other students of white-tails have noticed similar trends. Perhaps not so surprising is the fact that scientists have also noted that the dominate red deer stags, in both Scotland and Czechoslovakia, were the first to shed their antlers.

In addition to the influence of photoperiod, nutrition no doubt plays a role in the onset of antler casting. I remember a buck that Biol-

ogists Mack Walls and Larry Crane, and I observed at Radford Arsenal one day in late September. This over-the-hill buck was seen around the last of the month, and he was the only branched antlered buck observed that had not rubbed out of velvet. We could not help but notice the very poor condition of the 8-pointer when he slowly stood up from his bed in a broomsedge and eastern red-cedar field. Larry and Mack kept tabs on that individual buck and it was the very first branched antlered buck to shed its rack before the season was out. The buck, aged by Mack at over 9 1/2 years of age, was harvested as an



Bill Lea



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Top: Near rubs are good places to find antlers. Above: Antlers don't last long on the ground as weather, rodents and others do their work.



antlerless deer in December of that same fall, and we all doubted that this buck would have survived another harsh winter in the New River Valley.

Several years ago we were confronted with a potential need to extend the deer season on an emergency basis. Some folks thought we should not have any trouble simply extending the season until the end of January or into February, if the need arose. However, we opposed that notion based on antler loss and the idea that we could actually end up backsliding on deer quality, as being practiced by our DMAP cooperators and other deer managers. In fact, as

Right: Small mammals chew on antlers for the mineral content. Many antlers that are found have the tooth marks from the gnawing of some small rodents.

©Dwight Dyke



Above: Hunters often see a big buck in the woods who has shed only one antler. Photo by Bill Lea.

much as we hunters and managers would like to have additional time at the end of the season, the current deer season closing on, or around, January 7 is about as late as we can recommend without getting involved in the taking of shed bucks.

The latest I have personally seen a buck with one or both antlers was on April 3 in Hanover County and I have heard reliable reports of other deer with antlers in early April. However, these represent a very small percentage, and an exception to the general rule of antler loss in January, February, and March.

Shed antlers are like gold, they are where you find them!

I would venture that quite a few of the antlers picked up are found in conjunction with some other activity. I know I used to find several while grouse hunting, or even spring gobbler hunting, or while conducting deer browse surveys in the winter. One summer, while working as a firefighter and timber cruiser in Oregon, I found a number of mule deer and blacktail deer antlers

while covering a lot of ground each day on the job. Probably the most unusual recovery I ever witnessed occurred at night with a Virginia game warden in Giles County. The warden, Sgt. Steve Vinson, and I were looking for a deer that had been shot at by someone with a spotlight, and while "walking" through a thick patch of cutover, Steve reached down and picked up a shed antler. I guess it really is true that you can run from a game warden but you can't hide!

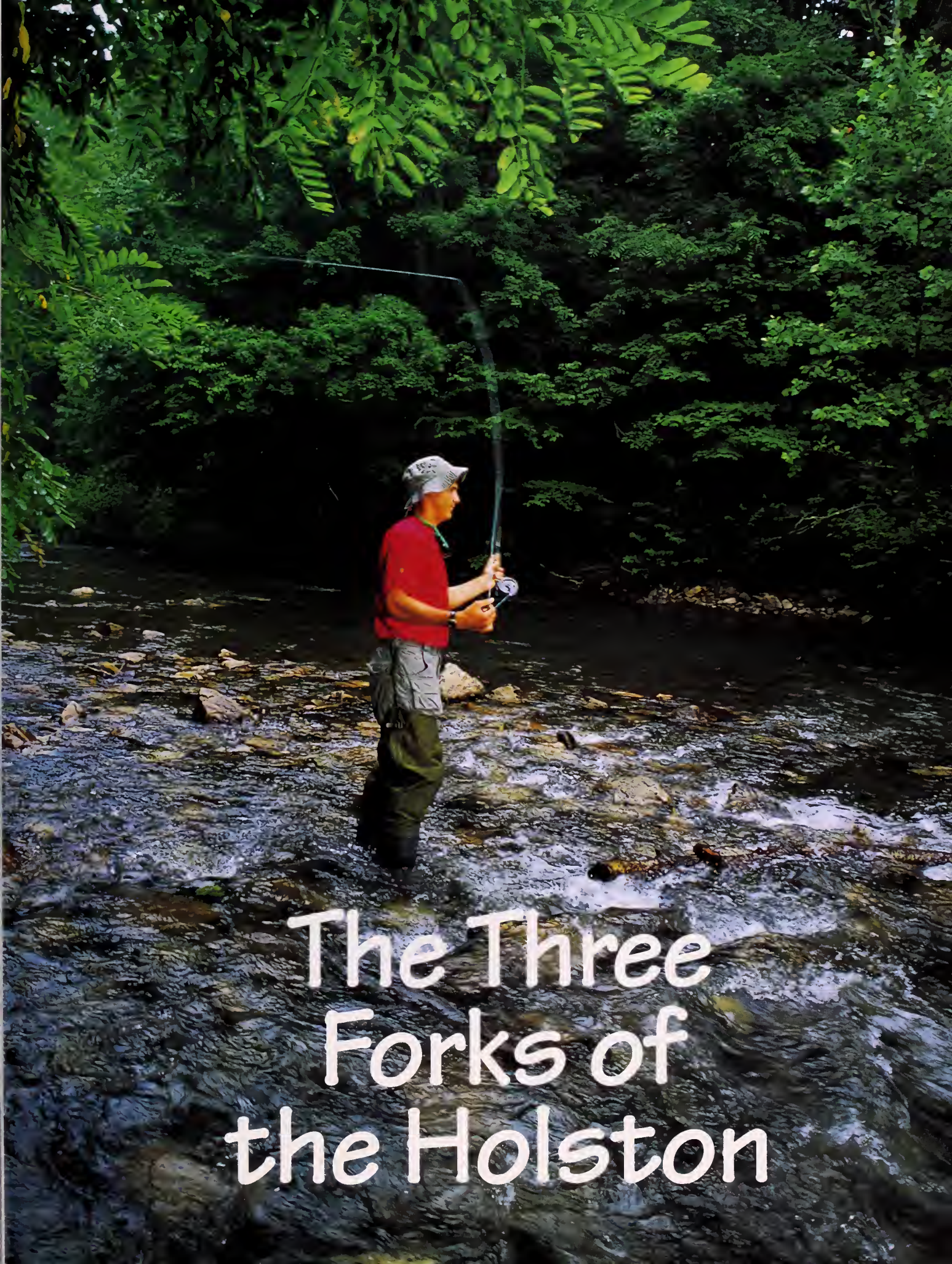
Of course nature has a way of hiding and ultimately recycling antlers via weather or small mammals that chew on antlers for the mineral content. Many of the antlers I have picked up have the tooth marks from the gnawing of some small rodents. The fact that you may have competition from some small furry antler-eating mouse should not stop you from trying your hand at hunting for shed antlers.

As mentioned previously, several serious deer hunters and managers hunt shed antlers each year as a means of scouting and record keeping. One Sunday morning in early March, I called a friend to ask if he would be interested in looking for sheds one weekend. As it turned out I could not go, but he went and found eight antlers in two hours! Apparently he discovered the proverbial "elephant burial ground" for shed antlers when he searched a pine thicket that was providing good winter cover at the time when bucks were casting their hardware. Whether you can find one antler or several, looking for sheds can be a great way to spend a day outdoors between the time your favorite team has either won or lost the Super Bowl and the start of the spring gobbler season. □

Bob Duncan is the director of the Wildlife Division of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Bill Lea



A person wearing a red shirt, grey pants, and a grey hat is standing in a river, fishing. The river is surrounded by dense green foliage and trees. The water is dark and rocky, with some white foam visible. The person is holding a fishing rod and reel, and the line is cast into the water. The overall scene is a peaceful outdoor setting.

The Three Forks of the Holston

by Bob Gooch

The Holston River is a well-known Tennessee river, but it's major tributaries, the North Fork of the Holston, the Middle Fork of the Holston, and the South Fork of the Holston are Virginia streams. Southwest Virginia treasures.

The three forks and their tributaries claim the very heart of Southwest Virginia—much of Smyth and Washington counties and a corner of Scott. The Middle Fork of the Holston gathers its headwaters near the Smyth-Wythe counties border and merges with the South Fork in the headwaters of South Holston Lake. The North Fork of the Holston River forms along the Smyth-Tazewell counties border and flows into Tennessee just south of Gate City. The South Fork of the Holston River forms just west of Sugar Grove to flow into the border lake on the Tennessee-Virginia line. Collectively, they touch a big chunk of Southwest Virginia's rugged mountains and fertile valleys.

The major stretches of all three forks are in Virginia, but both the North and South Forks enter Tennessee briefly to merge just south of the Virginia border to form the Holston River proper. The South Holston Dam impounds the South Fork to form South Holston Lake. The dam is in Tennessee, but much of the lake is in Virginia. The South Fork emerges from the big lake and marches west through Tennessee below the Virginia border to be joined by the North Fork just south of Weber City. From there on it's the Holston River. And hello, Tennessee!

The Middle Fork of the Holston is the only one of the trio that doesn't leave the Old Dominion.



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The delightful rivers are different enough to enjoy personalities of their own, but they are sisters. And like all sisters they have much in common.

Smallmouth bass, rock bass, and yellowbreast sunfish are found in all

three streams. That's a common trait that anglers enjoy, even though the quality of the fishing might vary between them. The angler can count on good bass fishing regardless of the stream, and the fishing for rock bass and sunfish is consistently good.



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*Left: Anglers will find trout the entire length of the South Fork.
Top: The North Fork can produce a variety of fish like this red horse sucker.
Above: Fisheries Biologist John Jessee chats with fisherman on South Fork of the Holston River.*

All three are wadable in their upper stretches, but probably best fished by canoe or light johnboat downstream. Where the wading ends and the floating begins is mostly a judgement call on the part of the angler. When dry weather plagues Southwest Virginia and the water level drops considerably, dragging a boat or canoe through the shoals is an accepted part of a float trip. A wet season on the other hand brings ideal floating conditions.

In none of the forks is there much fast water to really challenge a canoeist, though I made a run down the lower stretches of the South Fork a few years ago and encountered some tricky, but not truly dangerous water.

The water is reasonably clean in all of the streams—and improving. “The city of Marion upgraded its sewage plant recently and that has helped,” said John Jessee, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries’ (VDGIF) biologist stationed at Marion.

A problem common to all of the streams is the lack of formal access. That needs addressing. Jefferson National Forest lands and highway right-of-ways offer the only public access. Otherwise the angler or canoeist is dependent upon the good will of private landowners. Highway right-of-ways include bridge crossings and right-of-ways that extend to the banks of the streams. Fortunately such access is fairly common on all three forks.

All of the streams are free-flowing with plenty of fast shoals interspersed with long quiet pools, typical float fishing or wading water. Occasionally portaging around a low dam is necessary.

These are common features, but otherwise each fork goes its own particular route. All are interesting and offer some unique fishing opportunities.

Let’s look at the South Fork first. It’s the shortest and overall the smallest, but it drains some of Virginia’s most spectacular mountain country, high country such as

Mount Rogers at 5,729 feet. It's the highest point in Virginia, and nearby Whitetop Mountain reaches to 5,520 feet. Some of the best trout streams flow off of those slopes and many of them enter the South Fork. It's a very scenic stream.

"There are trout the entire length of the South Fork," said Jessee. We stock both fingerlings and catchable brown and rainbow trout in the upper reaches of the stream, but some of them drift downstream. We also have some wild trout—natural reproduction of both browns and rainbows. There are no native brook trout in the South Fork, but they are found in many of the tributaries." Jessee considers the South Fork one of the best trout streams in Southwest Virginia.

Upstream within the boundaries of the VDGIF's Buller Fish Cultural Station, a section of the South Fork offers catch-and-release trout fishing. It's fly-fishing only water and only single-hook flies or lures are permitted.

Muskies are raised in the Buller Fish Cultural Station and a few escape into the river. "We don't stock them in the river," said Jessee, but anglers catch a few. There are always some muskies in the stream. Walleyes make exciting spawning runs out of South Holston Lake beginning in early February and continuing through May. This has become an exciting fishing event. There is also a resident population of walleyes upstream to the Damascus area.

Another sign of spring is the spawning run of white bass out of the South Fork. This run usually begins about the third week in April, but it has dwindled in recent years. Biologists are studying the problem with corrective steps in mind.

The Appalachian Trail crosses the South Fork west of Sugar Grove and VDGIF and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service are in the process of establishing an educational display near the crossing.



Soc Clay

The shortest and smallest of the forks, the South Fork also offers the best and most varied fishing.

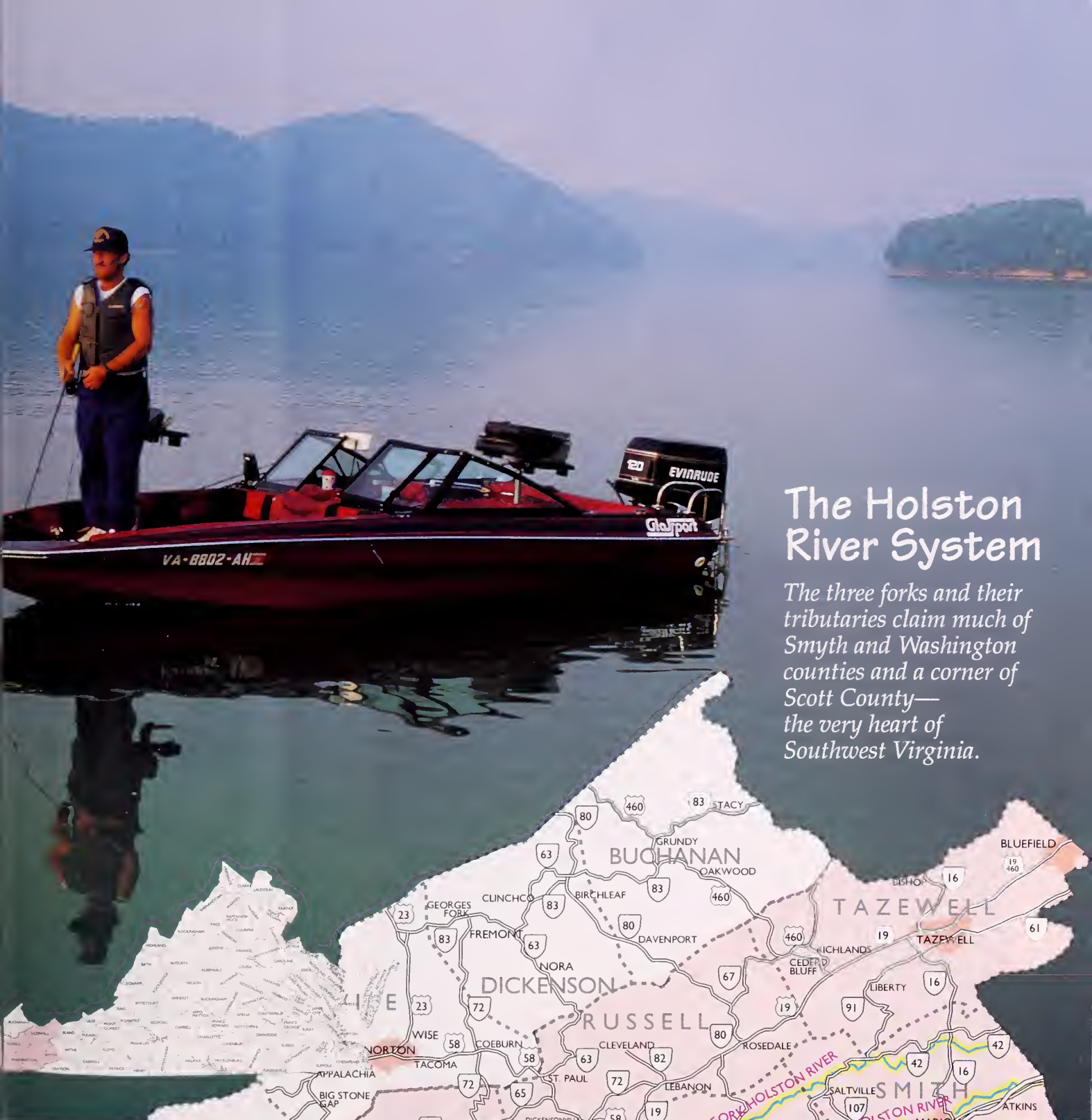
The longest and largest of the three forks is the North Fork, once used for shipping. It also offers the best smallmouth bass fishing, even though there is a health advisory prohibiting taking fish for human consumption downstream from Saltville. John Jessee, who recently floated 50 miles of the stream, says the smallmouth bass fishing is excellent. In fact, the North Fork could be one of Virginia's best kept smallmouth bass fishing secrets. There is also excellent fishing for rock bass and yellow-breast sunfish. Muskies were once stocked upstream from Saltville, but the presence of the fish is now doubtful. The fishing for channel catfish can be good.

While the North Fork suffers some from sedimentation, there are no major population centers on its banks. Far upstream there are the hamlets of Broadford, McCreedy, and North Holston. All three are upstream from Saltville, the major city on the stream.

Upstream from Saltville the North Fork is probably best fished by wading. The water is

Top left: Walleyes make exciting spawning runs out of South Holston Lake beginning in early February and continuing through May. Above: South Holston Lake.

Right: Although the dam is in Tennessee, much of South Holston Lake is in Virginia. Graphics by Pels.



The Holston River System

The three forks and their tributaries claim much of Smyth and Washington counties and a corner of Scott County—the very heart of Southwest Virginia.



clear, thin, and shallow, though a canoe or light johnboat could be used on much of it. Downstream it picks up volume quickly and much of it soon becomes too deep to be reached by the wading angler. The closer it gets to Tennessee, greater becomes the need for a light boat or a canoe.

The Middle Fork forms in the hills just south of Groseclose and flows beneath U. S. 11 Highway and I-81 as a bubbling brook. Unlike the North Fork which in places flows through miles of near wilderness where it is not easily accessible, the Middle Fork actually lives on the heels of civilization. Westward from Groseclose it flows parallel to U. S. Highway 11 and I-81 and the tracks

of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. The hum of highway traffic and the occasional whistle of a locomotive are seldom far away.

It also flows through the city of Marion and skirts Chilhowie before swinging south toward its confluence with the South Fork in the headwaters of South Holston Lake. Some maps still show a small, meandering lake approximately halfway between Chilhowie and South Holston Lake, but this dam has recently been breached and the river flows freely where it was once impounded.

Downstream toward its confluence, the Middle Fork meanders wildly and the water is often badly colored. "Carp and catfish keep it

stirred up," said Jessee. "They are bottom feeders and rout around creating the muddy water." This section of the river does offer some good fishing for channel catfish.

Because it is crossed often by secondary roads all the way from Groseclose to its confluence, the Middle Fork is probably the most accessible of the three.

There is a designated river walk, a maintained trail along the river through Marion. A number of organizations and individuals have formed the Middle Fork River Water Quality Committee. Included are the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, The Nature Conservancy, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. The committee is involved with an effort to clean up the Middle Fork and expand the Marion River walk to include a pier over the river where children and handicapped adults can fish and view the water. A Marion access point and launching ramp is also being considered for the Middle Fork.

Like the South Fork, the Middle Fork also offers both smallmouth bass fishing and trout fishing. "I feel the bass fishing is improving thanks to efforts to clean up the river," said Jessee.

"We stock trout in a mile stretch of the Middle Fork through Marion," said Jessee. "The stream above Marion is also a designated put-and-take trout stream," he added, "and fingerling brown trout have been released there."

Like its sister streams, the Middle Fork offers good fishing for rock bass and yellowbreast sunfish. "The fishing for channel cats can also be good," noted Jessee. The North and Middle Forks are the best catfish streams, but all three of them offer fishing for redhorse suckers, a favorite of many local anglers.

So goes the story of the three forks of the Holston River, the North, South, and Middle Forks. It is one of a number of excellent river systems with which Virginia is blessed. □

Bob Gooch is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.



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KATH

HARBINGERS OF SPRING

Song Sparrow

Story and Illustrations
by Spike Knuth



Killdeer

According to the calendar, spring begins around March 21 each year, the time of the vernal equinox. Usually we equate spring to warming weather, which is true to an extent, but also to the beginning of bird migrations both in and out of Virginia. However, in the world of birds, the movements and actions of a number of species tips us off to the fact that

spring is coming no matter what the weather looks like. Regardless of any snow or cold that may come along, annual bird migrations have subtly begun. Lengthening daylight hours is the "firing pin" that "ignites" birds into singing their spring songs or "triggers" their movement toward traditional breeding grounds.

Here in Virginia, it is sometimes hard to detect the first northward movements of birds since it is located on the northern edge of the wintering range of many species. The initial thrusts of their migrations are not always easily discernible. Some meadowlarks for example, commonly winter in the flat farmlands of the coastal plain around the big tidal rivers and the croplands of Northern Neck, Virginia Beach and Eastern Shore.

Robins begin definite northerly movements as early as late-January if they've been wintering farther south. However, if they've been wintering in Virginia, it's hard to detect those first waves. Flocks begin

sweeping through the woodlands, devouring any remaining holly berries. In March, scattered flocks become more common on lawns in the evenings, searching for worms, squabbling and chasing, just before going to roost amid constant chattering back and forth through the trees.

Large flocks of blackbirds also begin to get restless. These large flocks are made up of a variety of species including red-winged blackbirds, Brewer's blackbirds, rusty blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds and starlings. They cloud into small woodlots, fields and front lawns as they meander north. They mainly cover the croplands gleaning what remains of last year's grains, soybeans and peanuts.

Many bluebirds also spend the winter with us, especially in coastal and piedmont croplands edged with brushy hedgerows, and even some mountain valleys. Snowstorms or other severe weather may force them farther south, but frequently they take refuge in secluded swamp flowages of cypress, gum and cedar, or heavily forested river bottoms where they'll flock up with chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, kinglets and downy woodpeckers.

Some of the signs of spring are not sights but sounds. A number of species could qualify as the official message-bearers in heralding the ar-



Meadowlark

rival of spring. Song sparrows are among the first to be heard in spring. It's a rather plain little brown bird with streaked sides, and a large, dark brown blotch on its breast. This common, plain little bird can easily mix with English sparrows and



Eastern Bluebird

house finches and never be noticed. As early as February, the male will find himself an elevated perch in the sun, raise its head skyward and sing its little heart out. He gets so taken up with singing that at times he'll burst into song in the middle of the night!

Meadowlarks, too, are among the first to be heard singing their spring call. It will sit atop posts, stumps, poles or the top of a small tree to pour forth its high-pitched whistled notes. The cardinal is another bird that will suddenly erupt into spring song come February and March. He

begins his courting in February by feeding sunflower seeds to the female. He also becomes irritated by other males that may have spent the winter in his territory, especially young-of-the-year males, and drives them off effectively dispersing them and forcing them to establish their own home territory.

Mourning doves begin "cooing" as early as February and, in fact, will begin nesting that early. March will produce the first young doves of the year. Killdeers with black chest bands join plump, rusty-breasted robins with dark heads to feed in soggy pastures and large open lawns. The "kill-dee" call carries across fields, highway cloverleafs, and large, open construction sites. On a quiet evening, their soft "dee-dee" calls echo over freshly plowed fields as they settle down for the night.

The departure of some songbirds signals the coming of spring even as does the arrival of others. The hardy little juncos and white-throated sparrows that flitted about around the backyard feeder or in the



Robin

hedgerows are already moving north and will soon be replaced by yellow-rumped warblers, and house wrens. As a few warm nights and spring rains produce more insect hatches, purple martins, tree swallows and barn swallows will add their gurgling calls and aerial acrobatics to the new spring.

Spring always comes, and the "harbingers of spring" are there each year to announce it in their own way. Though each individual spring has predictable similarities, each has unpredictable variety. Like finger prints, there are no two alike. Each is different. Enjoy this coming spring. There'll never be another one like it!



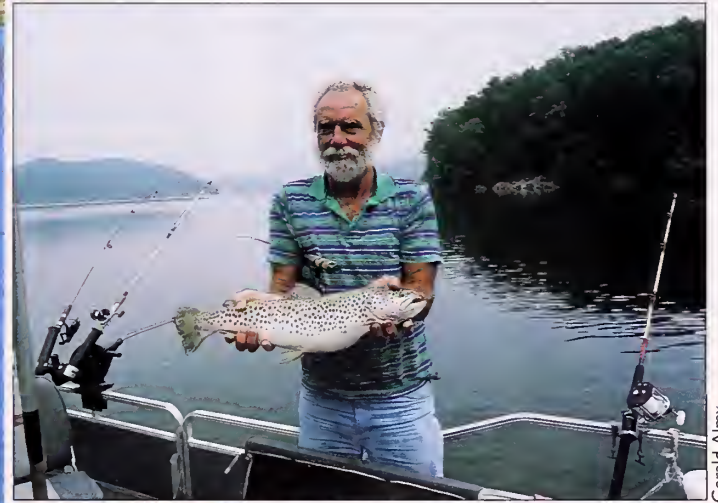
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Lake Moomaw's Trop



you decide you want to keep a few trout to make a meal, it's best to plan on several fish per person to make a decent portion.

There's another kind of trout fishing, though, in the Old Dominion—one that's only developed in recent years. The angling is a type most



Gerald Almy

Left: Not only is it full of fish, Lake Moomaw also abounds in scenery.

Above: Larry Andrews uses several rods to troll for trophy trout like this big brown.

people thought you had to make a long drive to the Great Lakes, out west to the Rockies or north to Canada to experience. It's big water lake fishing for trout so large that instead of needing three fish per person, one fish will feed a family of three. Fishing where the trout caught are shaped like footballs and measured in pounds, not inches.

Where is this big water trout mecca? At Lake Moomaw, one of the most beautiful bodies of water in the country, just north of Covington. Over its 14 years of existence, this crystalline mountain lake has evolved into one of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) most successful fish management stories.

I've fished the 2,600-acre lake built by the Corps of Engineers since it was first built back in the early 1980's, and the sport was excellent for some species as soon as the lake filled. My initial trips focused on bass, panfish and pickerel and the action usually ranged from good to superb. As Moomaw began to mature, however, and the other facet of

by Gerald Almy

ny Trout

For most Virginians, trout fishing means slipping along the edge of a small, gurgling mountain stream flipping out flies, spinners or worms and hoping to fool a 10-inch stocked fish or 8-inch native brookie. It's fun fishing, but if



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Soc Clay

its two-story (warmwater/coldwater) fishery developed, I became more and more intrigued with the trout angling it offered.

I had enjoyed several good outings over the years drifting live minnows near the thermocline and casting thin-minnow plugs to browns and rainbows slashing into alewives on the surface. But it was this past summer, on a trip with two of the lake's most dedicated trout anglers—Larry Andrews and Ira Ginger—that I got a true taste of the phenomenal sport this clearwater lake swaddled in folds of blue mountains can offer.

We met at 7 a.m. at The Bait Place on Rt 666. After picking up last minute supplies, we quickly loaded our gear into the large pontoon boat and drove to the lower end of the lake to the launch ramp.

Amazingly, there were only a few trailers parked there. The lake was practically deserted, even though the trout had been biting steadily for several weeks. As we eased out from the dock into the mist-shrouded waters it seemed like we were in a wilderness lake in Canada—the water was so clear and deep, the scenery so pristine, and there were so incredibly few people.

But while many people were ignoring Moomaw on this overcast summer day, Andrews and Ginger

weren't about to. They've been fishing the lake since it was formed and when they aren't working, chances are they're on Moomaw. Both anglers go after warmwater species at times, but mostly it's the trout that have captivated their imaginations. Over the years, they've developed a three-part trolling system that yields good catches from spring through fall.

"From May into July is especially good," said Andrews. "But you can take trout right through fall. Besides, when the leaves turn this lake is so pretty you don't really mind even if you don't catch anything."

That seldom happens to Ginger and Andrews, though. Through trial and error they've developed a technique that usually results in at least a few trout hooked, and sometimes even yields a limit of hefty browns in the 3-5 pound class.

"We started catching the trout around 1982, soon after VDGIF first stocked them. They were small at first, but put on weight quickly—in just a year they weighed several pounds. It's been good fishing ever since."

"We'll start trolling right here," Ginger said as soon as we eased away from the dock. Andrews began readying an assortment of spoons and plugs and setting the lines.

Left: This water release mechanism at the lake helps provide a fine cold water trout fishery downstream in the Jackson River.

Above: Smallmouth are one of several species found in the lake.

Opposite right: Kenneth Sexton is manager of the Gathright WMA that adjoins Lake Moomaw.

Opposite top right: Light tackle is all that's necessary for top water fishing at Moomaw.

Map: Location of Lake Moomaw in Alleghany and Bath Counties. Graphics by Pels.

"We use a variety of lures, because you never know what the trout are going to prefer any day on the water. One time it's one lure, the next day it's a different one."

Today we would troll a variety of spoons including the Hus, Renosky, Luhr-Jensen Alpena Diamond and Rapala. Two thin-minnow plugs—a Cordell Redfin and Rapala were also attached to lines. None of the lures were set to run shallow, though.

"The thermocline is around 40 to 45 feet. We use planers such as the Pink Lady, lead core lines and downriggers to take the spoons and plugs down to that level. The temperature there is about 55 degrees, and that's what the browns like best."

Although downriggers can cost \$100-300, the lead core lines and planers the pair uses can be purchased very inexpensively, allowing anyone to get their lures deep where the trout hang out. Ginger doesn't



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even use downriggers when he trolls in his own boat, simply using planers and lead core lines to take his spoons and plugs down to the payoff strike zone. Later in the year, in November and December, the trout will sometimes be so shallow

trout had nailed a size 51 Alpena Diamond with a green and silver finish.

You could tell it was a heavy fish from the way it throbbed, even against the heavy line. When he pumped it close we saw that it was well over the 16-inch minimum size limit as it thrashed and wallowed in the crystal clear water—a heavy brown. The trout was broad across the back and deep in girth. When Ginger slipped the net under the husky 3 pounder we were just ten minutes into the fishing day.

As the two anglers landed the trout and began to free it from the net, another outfit with leadcore line and a Redfin plug bounced in its holder. Since both of my hosts were occupied, I grabbed it and soon was fast to an even heavier trout. The fish pulled hard, but finally I was able to pump the thrashing quarry in close and Andrews slipped the net under a 22-inch brown that weighed nearly 5 pounds—ounces shy of citation size. It was a richly-colored fish that had been in the lake for several years.

"They grow quickly," said Andrews. "That one I

caught weighed about 3 pounds and was stocked just a year-and-a-half ago. The one you caught was probably in the lake two-and-a-half years. Moomaw has produced browns just shy of 12 pounds, but we know there are fish bigger than that in here."

I asked about the McCaughy rainbows from Nebraska that have been stocked for years, but Ginger said they seldom catch them trolling. "We'll take 20 or more browns for every rainbow. When you do hook one, though, you know it immediately because they rocket out of the water like a launched missile. Sometimes before you can even grab the rod they're up in the air jumping."

We had been fishing just 20 minutes and already had two trout in the boat with a combined weight just shy of eight pounds. It was incredible fishing, and to most people this quality sport helps make up for the loss of stream habitat and hunting land that occurred when the lake was created, flooding part of the Gathright Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

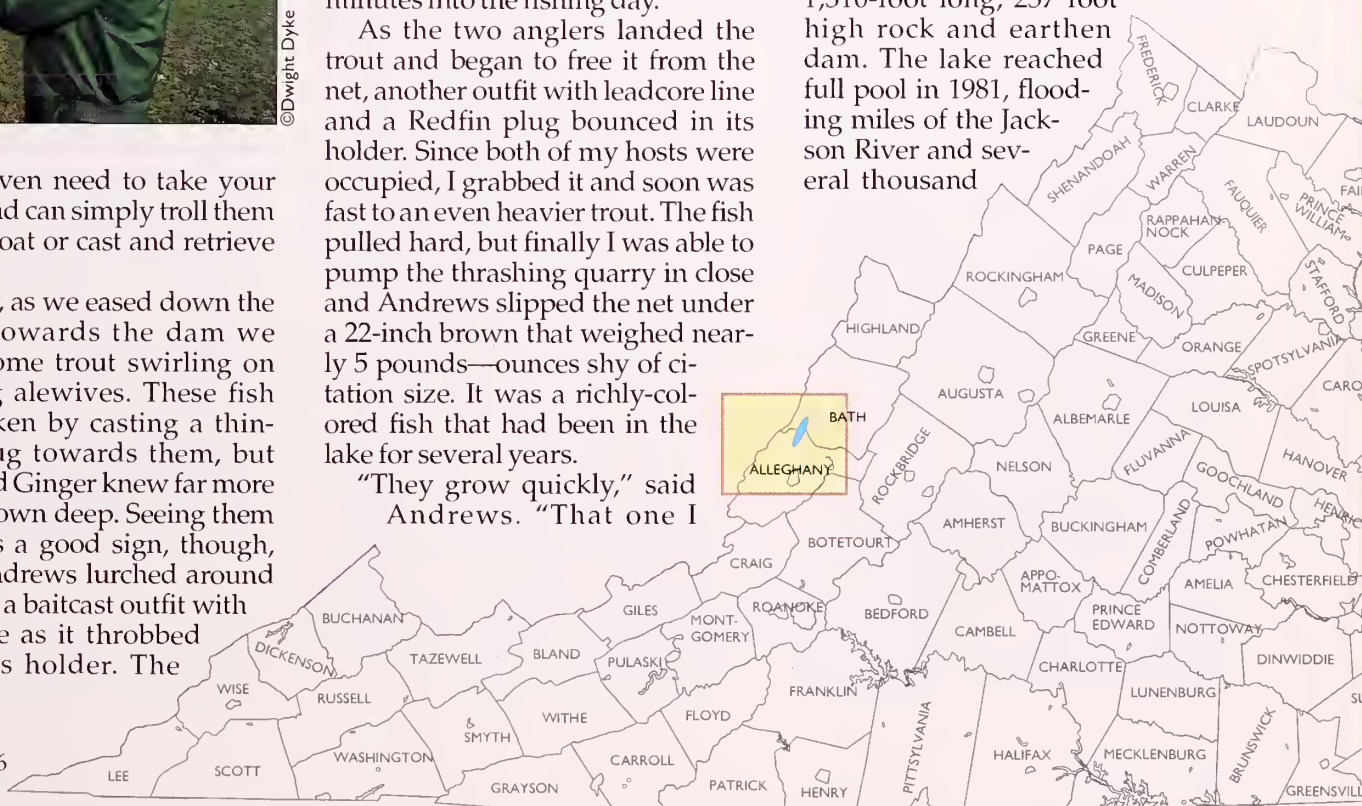
Construction of Lake Moomaw was authorized in 1946 as part of the Gathright Project, but due to various delays and opposition, construction was not begun until 1969 on the 1,310-foot long, 257 foot high rock and earthen dam. The lake reached full pool in 1981, flooding miles of the Jackson River and several thousand



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you won't even need to take your lures deep and can simply troll them behind the boat or cast and retrieve them.

Even now, as we eased down the long cove towards the dam we could see some trout swirling on top, chasing alewives. These fish could be taken by casting a thin-minnow plug towards them, but Andrews and Ginger knew far more trout were down deep. Seeing them slashing was a good sign, though, and soon Andrews lurched around and grabbed a baitcast outfit with leadcore line as it throbbed wildly in its holder. The



acres of prime hunting ground. But some 13,300 acres of the management area remain and the lake now provides good access to much of the steep, game-filled mountain land for hunting, hiking and camping. The Jackson River below the lake has turned into one of the premier tailwater fisheries in the eastern United States, thanks to the steady release of cold, oxygen-rich water from the dam. And Lake Moomaw, 12 miles long with 43 miles of shoreline, has turned into one of the top trout reservoirs in the South. So while it was once controversial, most people have learned to look beyond the past and appreciate Lake Moomaw, the great tailwater fishery in the Jackson below it, and the large amount of acreage that still remains in the Gathright WMA.

Miles of trails are available for hiking, as well as picnic areas, shaded lake-side campgrounds, two swimming beaches and excellent launch facilities run by the Corps of Engineers and U.S. Forest Service. A large visitor center overlooking the dam is open to the public, with information on the dam operation and construction as well as geology and wildlife displays.

Moomaw is popular with pleasure boaters, but it's fishing that draws most visitors to the scenic lake. Largemouth grow to weights of over 9 pounds and smallmouths over 5 pounds are caught every year. Crappies are not numerous because there is little cover in the way of bridges, timber or docks, but those caught are often exceptional in size—occasionally over 3 pounds. Bluegills and redear sunfish were both stocked, and some pickerel are still caught, though they have declined since the lake's early days, as expected. Channel catfish topping 20 pounds are available for bait fishermen.

It's the trout, though that's the star quarry at Moomaw. Besides trolling, several other methods produce good catches. One of the most common techniques is drifting with live minnows or alewives. The method works both at night and during the day. Crimp a few split

shot on 6-10 pound line, bait up with a minnow or alewife, then lower it so that it drifts at 40-50 feet, directly beneath the boat. Fish areas in the lower half of the lake where you mark trout suspended at that level on a depth finder, or simply drift until you locate them.

Another popular method of catching the lake's brown and rainbow trout is jump fishing. This is best from the crack of dawn until late morning, or sometimes all day in cloudy or drizzly weather. Simply watch for fish slurping minnows or alewives on the surface and be ready with a 6 to 7 1/2-foot spinning rod, reel spooled with 4-6 pound line and 3 to 4-inch shallow-running Rapala or Redfin tied on the end. Cast to the swirl or to the direction you see the fish cruising, then begin a slow steady retrieve. Reel just fast enough to create a V-wake on the surface without making the lure dive. You won't catch every fish you cast to, but over the course of a morning you should draw several strikes. As an alternative, you can try casting a small streamer on a fly rod to these surface-feeding trout. Work the fly back in short tugs of 6-12 inches.

Trolling is the third popular way to catch Moomaw's trout, and probably the most reliable. The technique had already yielded two trout in the 18 to 22-inch class for us in just 20 minutes since we left the dock. As we motored along near the dam we could see big marks on the flasher indicating more trout were down deep, but we didn't draw anymore strikes in the next half hour, so Andrews decided to steer the boat uplake. "We've been getting most of our fish up there," Andrews said.

"But, you have to be aware of the shoals and underwater ridges or you can lose a lot of lures and tackle. The depth can rise up from 70 feet to 30 feet in just a matter of seconds when you're in this upper part of the lake. That's why not as many people troll up here."

But this day no one was trolling anywhere. We saw two boats drifting with minnows, but no others pulling lures.

As we approached "the cliffs"

area where rock had been dug out to construct the dam, suddenly a rod snapped free from the downrigger and I was fast to a trout on light spin gear. This, too, was a keeper in the 18 inch range and after a feisty battle Ginger netted the fish and placed it in the cooler. A small brown came next, then another in the 3 pound range, followed by a fat trout of around 4 pounds.

"This is a better size than we usually average," said Andrews. "Generally you'll catch several small fish in the 1 to 2 1/2-pound range for every keeper you get. The big ones are really turned on today."

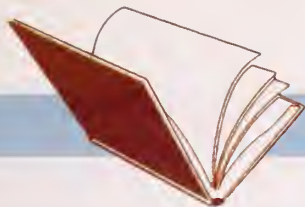
Indeed they were. Out of the first six fish we landed, five were 18 inches or longer.

Both anglers feel the reduced creel limit (2) and high minimum size (16 inches) should help the Moomaw trout fishery become even better. More fish will be able to reach the trophy class that they obtain so easily with the healthy food supply, untainted water and light fishing pressure.

Before lunchtime another large trout came our way and we eased back to the dock and called it quits for the day. That night I rubbed one of the brown's orangish-pink flesh with olive oil and lemon and cooked it over the grill. A better fish meal I have never tasted. And unlike the small stream trout I was used to catching, that one fish fed my wife, daughter and I and left us enough remaining for another meal. Not only does Moomaw provide exciting trout sport in a gorgeous mountain setting, it also offers some of the tastiest fish you'll ever sink a fork into.

For an update on how the trout are biting call or stop in at The Bait Place on Rt 666, 703/965-0633. For information on the camping and boating facilities on the lake, contact the Bolar Mountain Area at 540/639-2521 or the Morris Hill/Fortney Branch Area at 540/962-2214. □

Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for over 20 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of Sports Afield.



Journal

Operation Spruce-Up 1996

Governor George Allen has designated April as Operation Spruce-Up Month. This second annual volunteer effort has been extended from three weeks to four to allow even more people to participate in providing the care and maintenance needed to conserve Virginia's unique natural, recreational, historic and cultural resources.

"Governor Allen and I believe that a big part of Operation Spruce-Up is showing people that they can make a difference, that they can change something for the better," said Secretary of Natural Resources Becky Norton Dunlop. "Virginia's people, after all, are her greatest and most precious resource. Operation Spruce-Up simply encourages the spirit of volunteerism and stewardship in her citizens that will benefit the Commonwealth in undreamed of ways."

Currently the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is looking for volunteers, both individuals and organizations, to assist the Department with various projects at its wildlife management areas, fish hatcheries, public fishing lakes, and boat landings. If you or your service organization would like to pitch in at planting wildlife habitat, maintaining boat access areas, or improving shoreline on a public fishing lake, please contact Carol A. Heiser, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, 4010 W. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23230-1104 or call (804) 367-6989. □



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Some Traditions Remain

The tradition of "Opening Day" for the trout fishing season is still alive and well in Virginia, even though it would seem to be lost with the open-all-year program we now have.

Keeping alive the tradition is the annual children-only "Opening Day" festival on the Rose River in Madison County. It will be the same as always, the traditional third Saturday in March, which is the 16th. Starting time is 9 a.m. The festival is open to boys and girls 12 years of age and under, no license is needed, and there is no charge. State rules about size and bag limits apply.

The program, now in its 16th year, attracts upward of 400 boys and girls. The program is sponsored by the Rapidan Chapter of Trout Unlimited, landowner Jimmy Graves,

and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries which sees to it that plenty of fish are stocked for the young anglers.

The area reserved for children is a 3/4-mile stretch of the Rose River, a clear bubbly stream flowing through a meadow—no trouble with back casts—not far downstream from where it leaves Shenandoah Park. It is located on Route 670 between Criglersville and Syria, along a hard-surface road with plenty of off-road parking and room for family picnics.

Although on private land, it is open to public fishing except for the Friday preceeding children's day and of course that Saturday. For adults who want to fish it is open both above and below the children's section, as is the nearby Robinson River.

For additional information, call (540) 923-4231. □



Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Becky Norton Dunlop discusses wildlife with VDGIF Director Bill Woodfin and officials Dennis Quaiiff (left) and "Tex" Sadler (right) of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association. The group was among a large crowd at a recent reception sponsored by the Virginia Wildlife Federation to honor those groups that are working for wildlife in Virginia.

Hunters for the Hungry Establishes New Record

The recently concluded 1995 deer season was one in which successful Virginia hunters shared generously with the less fortunate. The Hunters for the Hungry program was able to accept, process, and distribute 103,575 pounds of quality venison to the needy. This establishes a new record for the program, easily surpassing the 82,000 pounds distributed in 1994.

David Horne, representing the Hunters for the Hungry program said, "We are pleased to have topped the 100,000 pound mark in 1995. Since our inception in 1991 we have grown annually and now have distributed 355,000 pounds of nutritious venison to the hungry of our state."

Hunters for the Hungry is a private non-profit organization dedicated to providing food for those in need, effective utilization of the annual deer harvest, and education regarding the realities of the outdoors and the tradition of hunting in Virginia. According to Horne, more needs to be done. He said, "We are

pleased with our progress, however, we are only about 50 percent of the way to our ultimate goal of providing 200,000 pounds of venison annually. Hunters are willing to make the deer available to us, our problem is the lack of financial support to cover the processing of the additional deer."

The majority of funds donated to the organization are used to pay for having the deer professionally cut, wrapped and frozen. These fees are required to assure that a quality food item is made available for distribution to food banks and other feeding agencies across the state.

Horne concluded by saying, "We are very appreciative of and thankful for all the hunters, processors, and financial supporters who have made 1995 so successful. We hope that in 1996 others within and outside of the hunting community will join with us so that our expansion and service to the hungry can continue."

For additional information or to contribute financially, write Hunters for the Hungry, P.O. Box 304, Big Island, VA 24526 or call 1-800-352-4868. □

Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop for Women

Hunting is a cherished Virginia tradition, and today more and more women are interested in learning about it firsthand.

Those who are interested in hunting are encouraged to begin their adventure at a weekend-long workshop on spring turkey hunting, March 29-31, 1996. In an atmosphere of hunting camaraderie, women will come together, have fun and learn the skills needed to seek out the "king of the game birds," the wild turkey.

The workshop is designed with the novice in mind. It will be taught by women and men who understand the specialized needs of the beginning hunter.

It will be held at the Airfield Conference Center in Wakefield, Virginia. The cost for the entire weekend is \$150, based on double room occupancy and will include all food, lodging, equipment, and take home materials. Hunter education certification will be available.

The deadline for registering is March 8, 1996, so hurry and call Anne Skalski for registration information at (804) 367-6778. Registration is limited to 40 participants, so please call now. A \$25 non-refundable deposit is required to reserve a place. Let us hear from you today.

Boneless Panfish Recipes

Spring is here! If you have young children, they want to go fishing. Older people also love getting out in the sunshine and catching crappie, bream, perch, rock bass and their relatives. All these panfish are wonderful to eat. A basic problem is that when they are simply gutted and scaled, bones are a problem, particularly for children. Besides, who likes having to pick out bones as the price for enjoying an otherwise good meal?

Here is an easy way of poaching panfish which does away with skin, scales and bones. It may make the job of cleaning fish a bit longer, but the result, enjoying a fish dinner without bones, is worth it.

Poached Small Fish

- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1/4 cup each chopped celery and onion

Small whole fish, heads and insides removed

Preheat oven to 375° degrees. Shake flour in a large-sized Reynolds Oven Bag. Place bag in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan. Spread celery and onion in bottom of bag. Arrange fish on top of vegetables in bag. Close bag with nylon tie; cut 6 half-inch slits in top. Cook small whole fish 30 to 35 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork through the bag. Remove all skin and bones from fish and flake meat for use in the following recipes.

Fish Pizzas

This fish pizza will be eaten avidly by children who drearily chant, "I hate fish."

- 2 cups cooked, flaked fish
- 1 cup catsup
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 1/2 teaspoons oregano
- 8 individual small pizza crusts
- 1 1/2 cups grated Mozzarella cheese

Combine catsup, onion powder and oregano. Add fish and mix well with a fork. Place several tablespoons of fish mixture on each pizza crust. Sprinkle about 2 tablespoons of cheese on each small pizza and place on a cookie sheet. Heat in a 350° oven for about 20 minutes or until hot and cheese melts. Makes 8 pizzas.

Fish and Sausage Patties

- 1 cup cooked, flaked fish
- 1 cup pork sausage meat
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon sage

Mix all ingredients thoroughly using your hands. Form into small patties and place these in a cold frying pan. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of water, cover pan and cook over low to medium heat until water is evaporated. Remove lid and continue cooking until patties are cooked through and brown on both sides. A little butter may be needed during the browning process depending on the fat in the pork sausage meat. Serve patties hot. Makes 15 to 20 small patties.

Savory Fish Quiche

- 2 cups cooked, flaked fish
- 3 eggs
- 1 can (10 3/4 ounces) creamy onion soup
- 1 can (2 ounces) mushroom stems and pieces, drained and chopped
- 3/4 teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning
- 1 cup shredded Swiss cheese
- 1 unbaked, deep 9-inch pie shell
- 1/2 cup shredded Swiss cheese
- Paprika

Combine eggs and soup; beat well. Stir in flaked fish, mushrooms and lemon-pepper seasoning. Sprinkle pie shell with 1 cup shred-

ded Swiss cheese. Pour fish mixture over cheese. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese and paprika. Bake in a moderate oven 375°, on lowest oven shelf for 35 to 40 minutes or until golden brown and knife inserted in center of quiche comes out clean. Let stand 10 minutes before serving. Makes 6 servings.

Hot Fish Salad

- 2 cups cooked, flaked fish
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup condensed cream of celery soup
- 1 jar (2 ounces) sliced pimiento
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups crushed potato chips
- 1/2 cup grated Cheddar cheese

Combine all ingredients except potato chips and cheese; mix well. Pour into a well-greased 2-quart baking dish or into 6 well-greased scallop shells or ramekins. Bake in moderate oven, 350 degrees, for 20 minutes. Combine potato chips and cheese; mix well. Sprinkle over fish mixture. Return to oven and continue cooking for 10 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Makes 6 servings.

Fish Hors d'oeuvres

- 1 cup cooked, flaked fish
- 3 egg whites, stiffly beaten
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon onion juice

Gently fold all ingredients into beaten egg whites. Spread mixture on small, lightly salted crackers and place under the broiler until slightly browned and puffy. □

Habitat

by Nancy Hugo

Virginia Pine

To a lumberman looking for straight timber, the Virginia pine may seem worthless, but to wildlife looking for food and shelter in late winter and early spring, this scrubby pine of abandoned fields and barren hillsides is priceless. Not only will the Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*) grow where other trees won't (in poor soils and in exposed situations), but its branches often grow low to the ground, providing cover where evergreens with higher crowns don't.

Virginia pine is also an important seed source. Its cones have small, light brown, winged seeds wedged between the cone scales, and because they're released over a long period (sometimes as long as four years after they mature), they're available to wildlife long after many other food sources have been depleted. Some birds, like nuthatches, chickadees, and grosbeaks, eat pine seeds from the cones while they're still on the trees; other wildlife, like turkey, quail, chipmunks, and rabbits, eat nutritious pine seeds from the ground. Because they're not really attached in any way to the cones, the seeds are easily dispersed by wind once the cones open. (These aren't the culinary seeds known as pine nuts; those come from western pinon pines). Squirrels gnaw the seeds from pine cones even before they open, and red crossbills, birds rare in Virginia but worth looking for, pry the cones open with their unusual crossed beaks.

Pine needles have wildlife value both as food for browsers and as nest-building materials, and the Virginia pine's branching pattern provides a particularly fine foundation for nests. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology ranks pines as among

the upper echelon of nest-site trees, those providing nesting sites for over 20 species.

Virginia pines also play an important role in the ecosystem. They are a pioneer species, claiming ground for other tree species. On poor soils, for example, Virginia pines are often the first trees to grow, sometimes form-



©Dwight Dyke

Virginia pine trees provide good food and cover for a variety of wildlife.

ing thick stands until they begin to thin themselves out. If the sunlight created by holes in the canopy doesn't encourage too much honeysuckle or greenbrier, dogwood and redbud will join the aging Virginia pine, and hardwoods will follow, eventually overtopping them and shading them out. Virginia pines, thus, "hold" the land for about 75 years, until more valuable trees, like oaks, succeed them.

So why are these native pines so underappreciated? Part of the reason, I think, is the way they look. "Scrubby" and "scraggly" are the

two words I've heard used most often to describe the Virginia pine, and it's true they have an unkempt appearance. Their needles are short (1 ½ to 3 inches long), slightly twisted, and divergent, which helps account for their disheveled appearance, but they also lack the stature and symmetry of many more stately pines. Even at maturity, Virginia pines are only about 30-60' tall with an open habit and irregularly spreading branches. On the Piedmont hillsides where I know them best, they take on a hoary appearance because they grow so close together, have such twisted trunks, and hold so much dead wood, but even a young Virginia pine growing alone in an open field often looks gnarled. Once you've begun to appreciate it, however, their asymmetrical form takes on an almost oriental beauty, because, like bonsai, these pines seem to show the sculptural effects of weather and age even when young.

Among the distinguishing features of the Virginia pine are the prickly appendages on its 2-3" cones (each cone scale has a stout spine ending in a sharp point), and the number of needles to a bundle. Virginia pine has two needles to a bundle, while loblollies have three and white pines have five. Virginia pine cones also tend to stay firmly attached to the tree's branches even after they are mature, and, even on the ground, Virginia pine cones are often still attached to their twigs. I've heard squirrels often gnaw off twigs with multiple cones for ease of transport, but I don't know that for sure. What I do know is that these scrub trees of poor, dry soils offer more to wildlife than we usually give them credit for. □



by Col. William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

Free Boating Courses Available

A person purchasing a boat can be handed the ignition key, and then take off toward the horizon, with no knowledge of boating skills.

That cannot be done with an automobile. The operator must demonstrate vehicle handling skills and knowledge of pertinent laws.

Throughout the history of recreational boating, skilled and knowledgeable boaters have taught the inexperienced and unskilled who are in the sport.

Today, with the number of boats and boaters and consequent boat congestion, there are more navigational rules and related laws which every boater should know. Virginia now has over 216,000 registered recreational boats plus, 100,000 unregistered. Also boating is an activity with a built-in danger element related to the inherently hazardous marine environment. With proper training, experience and judgment, boaters can manage and minimize the risks.

Virginia offers a free boating course which is taught four nights, with two hours of instruction each night. The course trains student boaters in a way which enables them to develop knowledge and skills which reduce risk and helps trained boaters to cope with unexpected situations requiring boating knowledge and skills.

The course is designed to teach boat handling, navigational rules, legal aspects of boating, piloting, knots, weather, anchoring, distress signaling, and emergency action. The information is useful to both owners/operators and passengers who are just along for the fun. Knowing safe boating practices and



©Dwight Dyke

principles will prevent trouble as well as aid boaters in getting out of difficulties.

Boat operators are responsible for the safety of their boats, passengers, and any damage their boats or their wakes may cause. Ignorance of proper boat operation, pertinent laws, and rules related to boating is no excuse in the event of serious problems or accidents.

The course content recognizes the facts that most fatal accidents are caused by falls overboard and capsizing. Most collisions are caused by inattention on the part of the operators. Although fires and explosions occur less frequently, they account for a high percentage of property loss.

The boating courses are taught in various Virginia locations depending upon requirements. When a course need is evident, a Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' regional boating education coordinator will arrange for a

Boaters, both young and old, should take a boating safety course before operating their watercraft.

course to be taught in that part of the state. The course is taught by experienced state certified instructors. Proof of successful course completion is accepted by most insurance companies as qualification for insurance premium reduction. There is no cost for instruction, textbooks or other course materials. The course text is a basic book which covers the essentials needed for safe boat operation. More advanced and detailed courses are offered by the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary and United States Power Squadrons.

For information on course offerings call (804) 367-9369 or Boat U.S. at 1-800-245-BOAT. Information on course locations and dates may also be obtained by writing the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. □

Photo Tips

By Lynda Richardson

Your Code of Ethics: What is the Cost of a Photograph?

Upon seeing wildlife in films and photographs, many wonder what it took to get those fantastic shots. A lone wolf running through the snow directly at the camera, a brilliant red cardinal looking alert on a flowering dogwood, black bears fighting in a whirlwind of tooth and claw, and a majestic bull elk squealing hauntingly on a frosty fall morning. These images can create such excitement and inspiration that it makes you want to pick up your camera, get out there and start shooting similar wildlife photographs. The only problem is, you venture out into the wilderness and don't see anything, or if you do, it's too far away to photograph. Since you haven't been able to buy the telephoto you'd like, you need to get a lot closer to get similar inspiring shots. Here lies the problem that has plagued wildlife photography since its beginning.

All is not necessarily as it would appear. Many wildlife photographers and film makers use captive subjects for specific scenes they are trying to portray. Wolves running through the snow are sometimes "wildlife models" called by handlers to gallop happily towards paying photographers. Black bears fighting are sometimes wild animals which have been illegally fed in a national park and are fighting over the slices of bread thrown to them by thoughtless tourists...or photographers. What is going on here?

Many photographers get frustrated at seeing fantastic wildlife images and not being able to capture them on film. Usually they don't have time, patience, knowledge, or the equipment it takes to make the perfect shot so they try to get closer to an

animal. A tidbit of one's lunch seems a harmless lure to bring animals closer. But how many people have done it before you? How many people will observe you feeding the animals and follow your lead? What one doesn't always realize is that animals which are fed become used to people and a lack of fear of people makes them bold and more liable to challenge or attack you for additional food. If a tourist is attacked, the animal becomes a "nuisance" and is killed or shipped away from the only place it's known as home.

Not everyone behaves irresponsibly for a photograph. All I'm trying to say is that people photographing wildlife should be aware and re-



Staying too long and getting too close could have devastating effects on this colony of royal terns nesting on Fisherman's Island. Photo by Lynda Richardson.

sponsible for the consequences of their actions. Getting close to a wild animal stresses it out, period, and stress sometimes makes it change it's behavior. Animals have been known to move den sites, abandon young, withhold food from offspring, fight other animals, beg for food, attack photographers, and even die from stress related to having it's picture taken.

Now we can debate how close is too close until we're blue in the face. We can even argue the amount of time spent with an animal and what

would be considered appropriate. We can write loads of rules and have centuries of debates. But, I think it all boils down to evaluating the situation and using your best judgement based on a wide ranging knowledge of wildlife behavior and the habitat an animal calls home. And most importantly, your sense of ethics.

Ethics are "a discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation." If a person wants to photograph an animal, they need to do a little research about their potential subjects and the area they will be traveling. This information is important as it will be key to making an evaluation as to how your actions will affect wildlife.

This is not something to be taken lightly. Today, the controversy surrounding ethics is in the forefront of wildlife photography. At the first annual meeting of the North American Nature Photographer's Association (NANPA) in 1995, ethics was the main topic of discussion. Wildlife photographers and editors are pushing for honest and ethical portrayals of all wildlife imagery in publications. Magazines are beginning to note in their photo captions whether an animal was photographed "under controlled conditions" or in the wild, so the public has a better understanding of how images were shot.

In pursuit of wildlife photography, go in armed with as much knowledge about your subjects as possible. Be patient and sensitive to your subjects needs and evaluate each situation as to its ethical implications. Not only will you be sending the right message, you will also protect the object of your efforts and love...wildlife. □

Taxes are for the birds...

In the case of Virginia's Nongame Wildlife program, taxes are literally for the birds. At least your state income tax checkoff can be. You can support the study and management of habitat for nongame species by checking off a donation to Virginia's Nongame Wildlife program on your state income tax form.

Here are some examples of species that benefit from the Nongame Fund: the green treefrog, spring peeper, corn snake, eastern painted turtle, eastern box turtle, American

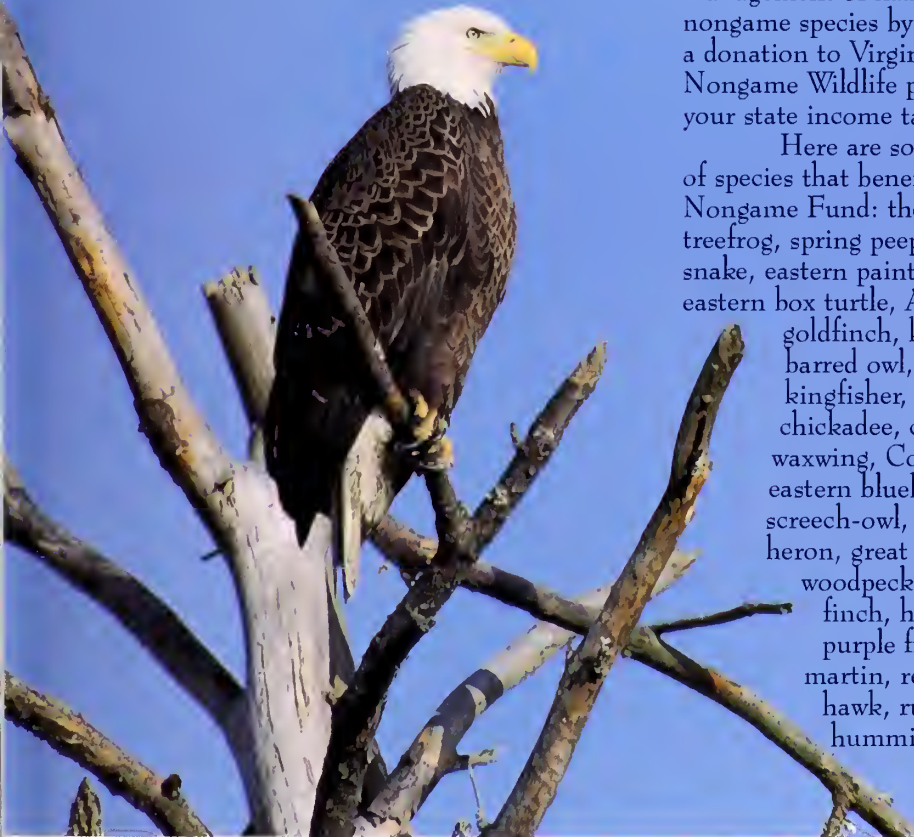
goldfinch, kestrel, barred owl, belted kingfisher, black-capped chickadee, cedar waxwing, Cooper's hawk, eastern bluebird, eastern screech-owl, great blue heron, great egret, hairy woodpecker, house finch, house wren, purple finch, purple martin, red-shouldered hawk, ruby-throated hummingbird,

tufted titmouse, whip-poor-will, big brown bat, common eastern chipmunk, southern flying squirrel, talkative red squirrel, bald eagle and peregrine falcon.

Every dollar counts. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries receives no General Fund tax dollars, and the Nongame Wildlife Program sustains its work and responsibilities through the generosity of the citizens of Virginia. As you can see from the above list, everyone of us benefits from and enjoys nongame wildlife.

Remember ... when it comes to Virginia's Nongame Program, we're all for the birds.

Please check off a donation to Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Fund on your state income tax form today, or send your tax-deductible check, made payable to the Treasurer of Virginia, to: Virginia Nongame Wildlife Fund-VW, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P. O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.



Bald eagle; photo by Bill Lea

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the James River's successful partnership with recreation, industry and the environment.

To order this 60 minute VHS tape send \$16.95 plus \$3.00 (shipping and handling) for each copy to:

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